

**TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD PUBLIC HEARING  
JULY 16, 2019**

President. Cantor: We will begin with the 5:30 Public Hearing. This is a substitute ordinance. The Town of West Hartford designating intersections to be regulated against blockage under CGS section 14 through 2250(b)a. We will start with a roll call. Ms. Labrot.

Councilors Present: Barnes, Cantor, Davidoff, Kerrigan, Sweeney, and Wenograd  
Absent: Councilors Dodge, Fay and Williams

President Cantor: Thank you Ms. Labrot. Do we have a presentation? Mr. Hart.

Mr. Hart: We do Mayor. Thank you. This is what we see as an important measure designed to promote traffic safety and risks we reviewed it at committee level and our town engineer, Duane Martin is here to make a brief presentation to the Council and to the Public.

Mr. Martin: Good evening everybody. Duane Martin, West Hartford Town Engineer. So, we have before you tonight an ordinance which we are referring to as, in the office at least, as 'do not block the box'. Essentially, it is a traffic control measure that is done at busy intersections or driveways where traffic tends to block the intersection or driveway and cause an unsafe situation where motorists may unfortunately make a sudden or an unexpected maneuver, which then leads to a crash. There are measures that can be put in place. We have them in town in a few locations, which essentially are signage and pavement markings to give the message to motorists to not occupy that space if they are intending to stop and that keeps that open for motorists to cross, whether they are entering or exiting the driveway or intersection. There are also signs that would be placed adjacent to these pavement markings, which would further indicate essentially do not block the intersection subject to fine. We have four locations in town and they are, I believe they are listed on the ordinance but I will go through them. New Park Avenue at the CT FastTrack driveway, which was one that the state DOT approached me with just to get a little bit safer maneuver in and out of their access there to that CT FastTrack Station, what we refer to as the Flatbush Station. Farmington Avenue at 4 North Main Street, 4 North Main Street being the Bank of America they have an exit onto Farmington Ave and that has been a high crash location. So, the improvement was made there some time ago. Raymond Road at the Police and Fire exits, which was requested by the police and fire to get them easier access out to respond to emergencies. The last location, which is one that is fairly new, which is Farmington Ave. Technically, Route 4. It is a state highway at that location at the intersection of Everett Avenue. I have a handout which demonstrates that

if you can just pass that along. Just to give you an idea of what I am referring to. So, that is an aerial photograph of the Farmington and Everett intersection and it shows you the proposed pavement markings. You can see there is a white outlined area of paint, which then has diagonal white crossings to indicate not to stop in that location and it is positioned on Farmington Ave. in the eastbound direction so that the motorists that are stopped at the traffic signal on Farmington Ave. approaching Boulevard and holds no lane and do not back up and block Everett, we are also creating a left turn lane there for those residents to have access to Everett Avenue at the same time and then as I mentioned there will be signs posted alongside the location where those markings will be to identify to do not block intersection subject to fines. The reason we are going the extra measure of the ordinance is because we are supposed to identify to the state where we have these locations so if we add any in the future we need to update the list by way of the ordinance. It specifically requires the locations to be listed in the ordinance and by way of having the ordinance, then the police can then administer fines as needed for any safety issues that occur at those locations.

President Cantor: Thank you Mr. Martin. Is it consistent that all of the intersections have that hashtaggy kind of ...

Mr. Martin: Yes. I believe that there is only one location where the paint actually extends in both directions and that is the one on Raymond Road at the Police and Fire exit. They asked that it go across both directions, but all the others are just in one direction usually because they are adjacent to a traffic signal where the traffic backs up in that one direction. The idea is to be uniform with the markings and the signage. So, the locations have signage out there but the messages are mixed depending on location, so we are going to replace those all with a standardized message.

President Cantor: Thank you very much. Any questions for Mr. Martin? Councilor Sweeney?

Councilor Sweeney: Just on the Farmington Avenue and North Main Street, logistically how is that going to be, that is what a 5-way intersection, 6-way, 6 right? How would you enforce that? Where would you put a police officer?

Mr. Martin: The markings and the driveway are set away from or to the east of the big intersection of Farmington and Main so the markings are there. They are in the westbound direction so as you are approaching Main Street, say coming from Trout Brook Drive you are going up the hill and so a police officer could be staged somewhere nearby across the street or perhaps in the parking lot for the Bank of America. I do not think that they will do that. I think a lot of these are intended just to give the motorists the

message and then should an incident occur they should have known better and now you can administer a fine and hopefully they do not do it again.

Councilor Sweeney: But in that intersection it is just basically backed up no matter what.

Mr. Martin: Right:

Councilor Sweeney: It is enforcing something that intersection is not designed...it just does not seem like it is fit for the amount of traffic that goes through it; therefore, by instituting a fine or do not block the box here is not clearly, is not, I guess in regards to it is just the way it is made up does not seem like it is going to be something that is going to be other than frustrating or it does not seem very enforceable; therefore, I am not really sure of the point of it because if you are going west on Farmington Avenue through the center, the light is at the very top of that hill, right? But you cannot get, if you have that traffic stopping right there, I mean, you have four or five cars that go into the intersection at that point to go left onto Main Street. You are talking about significant traffic backups just if you strictly enforce that. I guess that is where I...strict interpretation of that could cause it would seem like a significant backup in all directions just because of the, I mean, generally the flow of that intersection is terrible. I mean, if you look at it right now it is horrendous just coming up from it and you can see the backup from that intersection all the way at the bottom at Trout Brook. I guess that is where I...

Mr. Martin: To be clear, the intent of that location is not in the intersection at Farmington and Main. Sometimes cars do get hung up when they are trying to make a left. That is not the location we are talking about. This is in advance of that.

Councilor Sweeney: Yeah.

Mr. Martin: The bank has an exit and a lot of people are trying to have access to Farmington Avenue and it is causing crashes.

Councilor Sweeney: Yeah.

Mr. Martin: Often times what happens on a multi-lane road like that is the motorist that stops on the curbside lanes sees the motorist trying to exit and they will wave them into traffic.

Councilor Sweeney: Yeah.

Mr. Martin: And they do not see the other car coming up in the adjacent lane and then it causes a crash and that was what was occurring there. It essentially occupies about a 15-foot long box area.

Councilor Sweeney: I am familiar with it. I am just saying in regards to that just general intersection blocking a space going into another area that is overwhelmed

with traffic overall, this seems I do not know, it is complete chaos there in the rush hour or if it is Saturday morning around 10 or 11. I do not know.

Mr. Martin: Often times where these are located is very busy intersections just they go hand-in-hand that is the reason why the crashes occur and they end up installing measures like this to try and prevent awareness, promote awareness to prevent crashes.

Councilor Sweeney: Thank you.

President Cantor: Thank you Councilor Sweeney. Thank you Mr. Martin. Councilor Barnes.

Councilor Barnes: Just following up on that. Is the box that we are talking about on Farmington, does that cover both lanes or is that just the first lane?

Mr. Martin: It is both westbound travel lanes.

Councilor Barnes: And is it designed to allow for a left and a right exit out of the bank parking lot?

Mr. Martin: It is. It is setup that way just to try not to discern between the two, but I think the benefit is more so for the left turning vehicle, which is a challenge more so than the right turning vehicle out of that driveway.

Councilor Barnes: Sure and they are going to be looking right to see what is coming before going out into traffic and there is the potential of actually getting stuck in that box. I mean, I think of the block the box you think about it like New York City style where it is actually the heart of the intersection where you are waiting to see if you can go through that intersection. The light changes, you wait and do not get stuck in the middle, this is a different variety of you know trying to you know ease congestion there, but it seems like it may be creating just different problems having it there.

Mr. Martin: I do not know that it has been a problem per se. I have not heard complaints about it. What I have seen is mixed results. Sometimes motorists will do exactly as we want them to and leave an opening there, they see an exiting motorist. Other times, they just disregard it in which case the person trying to exit the bank just has to wait longer to make that left turn. I have seen what happens is they will pull if people stop and do not block the box, the exiting motorist will pull into the travel lanes and take advantage of that. Usually there is a gap because the intersection, as was described, is pretty busy and provides some maneuvering, usually because a pedestrian is there. Coming up so frequently and taking so much time, it allows that gap in that traffic because there is no turn on red at the intersection. Usually there is an availability for them to sneak out.

Councilor Barnes: And just one other question. If there is a fine or a ticket that is imposed, do we know how much the ticket would be?

Mr. Martin: \$117.

Councilor Barnes: First offense?

Attorney Alair: Any offense. It is actually set, to be clear, it is set by the State, not by us. If the violation is an infraction once we designate the location, it is actually a...locations identify where the violation takes place, but it is a State statute violation and the State sets the infraction schedule and this one is \$117.

Councilor Barnes: I do not remember exactly how this works, but are there points involved? Can you get points for this type of infraction?

Attorney Alair: I did not check that, but let us see if I can find out. Hang on.

Councilor Barnes: I thought you were going to tell me it was 25 bucks like a parking ticket; \$117 is substantial and makes me wonder about, you know, what we are going to do in terms of community outreach and let people know that because the box has been there, it has been there for a while, that we are actually now going to, you know, start enforcing it the police are going to start enforcing it, to let people know how significant that is. It is a lot of money.

Councilor Sweeney: I have a question.

President Cantor: Councilor Sweeney.

Councilor Sweeney: Is there been thought about making that a right only turn there?

Mr. Martin: Well there are two lanes there and the parking lot can get kind of tight so if you only have the one lane it would stage, in their site, quite a bit.

Councilor Sweeney: To Councilor Barnes' point, I frequent that area. If you are pulling out and it is two cars deep, you cannot see left. You have to essentially be in the eastward bound lane to be turning left to just poke out because at that time you just cannot see it and whenever I go on that lot I always come back the other way where you are close to the light and you can see the traffic, you are not really worried about any parts out, but I do not know if it is something that you might consider looking at as just making that a right turn only because I know it is really difficult to get into that back lot and I also know that the other access point to that is North Main Street, but I think the two properties do not agree on access to the bank at any rate because people were cutting through it or something like that.

Preside Cantor: I do again let me know if...the ordinance is this is...I think we are talking about two issues. I think one we are talking about taking a left turn lane out of that, that really is not this particular issue. This is identifying intersections were you do not, on that same side of the street, right? That

is what we would be voting on and this, I think, is another important, but not necessarily, you know, specific to this naming of this particular intersection on turning right or left, but that block has always been there so we have to list it as...if we want to continue.

Mr. Martin: My division gets traffic complaints all the time, as does the police department, so we can certainly look into it.

Councilor Barnes: What are the accidents though? Are the accidents on people turning right or are they on people turning left?

Mr. Martin: It was left.

President Cantor: Yeah, makes sense.

Councilor Barnes: So, I mean, I do not know

Councilor Sweeney: But that would...

Councilor Barnes: That would make it easy...turning right.

Mr. Martin: That was before the pavement markings and the signage were there so we can revisit and see.

Mr. Martin: Yeah, I mean, to the Mayor's point, that is not what is currently before us, but I also think that we would not be having this conversation about blocking the box if it was only a right hand turn and it would totally slow down people...you could speed up that process wherever you cannot go left, you know, you would be looking at the same sort of fines or whatever if you are looking at enforcement, but it is chaos to see someone turning left there. You just pray for them when they are turning left there because it is not safe.

President Cantor: Any other? Ms. Kerrigan.

Councilor Kerrigan: A quick question and I am not a big fan of signs because I go back to that song 'Sign, sign, everywhere there's a sign', but, and I am certainly dating myself because many of you probably do not know it, but when do we decide to put a sign that says what the penalty will be for an infraction?

Mr. Martin: Well, in this case, the sign, I do not know if you saw it on that print out, it basically just says subject to fine. It does not list the fine and I think the reason for that is because it could change and then we would have to replace the signs. I do not know if have signage that has a fine listed on it. I am trying to think, I thought we might. I do not know if it is for that reason or not. It could be.

Attorney Alair: I cannot think of any.

Councilor Sweeney: I cannot either.

Councilor Kerrigan: A three-figure fine.

President Cantor: Thank you.

Councilor Kerrigan: Okay.  
President Cantor: Mr. Barnes.

Councilor Barnes: Yes, just to finish that thought about the fine and whether there what is involved because it is substantial, the amount of the fine, maybe we would consider doing something like, you know once we put the signs up and had the equivalent of a soft roll out so to speak so that people could get, you know, adjusted to it the signs, see everyone is reacting to it before having the police actually issue tickets for that offense to give everyone an opportunity to ...

President Cantor: Mr. Hart.

Mr. Hart: We could certainly do something of a communications campaign on this and issue warnings for first offense and pick it up over time.

Attorney Alair: As far as the points go, I am not seeing it the list of points-related offenses. Understand that in Connecticut DMV establishes the points that are assessed against the driver's license, the Superior Court establishes the fines, the infraction schedule; so they are in two different places. The infraction schedule is easy to find. The point system, it took me a little bit longer, but it does not appear to be on the list.

Councilor Barnes: Yeah, and just so long as we can if we are going to get the word out, if there are points involved, to make people aware of that as well. Alright. Thank you.

President Cantor: Thank you Mr. Barnes. Thank you Mr. Alair. Just to be clear, the penalty, the fine, the money goes to the State, correct?

Attorney Alair: Yes.

President Cantor: Just put that on the record. Anybody else? Mr. Davidoff.

Councilor Davidoff: Thank you madam Mayor. So, just as a comment from like a thousand feet away, the intent here is to make certain that there is safe access for emergency vehicles to get with respect to the police station, out of the police station. With respect to CT FastTrack, to be able to access that area safely in an emergent situation. The emphasis and the intent is not for us to place police officers at these four places to try to get you for \$117. Our police are very busy throughout the town and that is not what the intent is here. The intent is basically to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and car safety and should there be situations where those are being impacted quite negatively on a routine basis, then I would think we would see enforcement action take place and I think that is what was discussed at committee. So, I just wanted to just bring it down just a notch in terms of that because I think that is what we talked about when we met upstairs in

Room 400 that when the Chief mentioned this, these are the four spots that he identified that could be problematic but the intent was not to have someone there waiting for a violator. I think that is important to also get into the record, and I do think that the other comments that my colleagues said are quite germane to the ordinance as well so thank you.

President Cantor: Thank you Mr. Davidoff. Mr. Sweeney, your mic is on and I do not know if you are...

Councilor Sweeney: Oh, nope.

President Cantor: Alright. Anything further? Is there anybody in the audience that would like to speak to this Public Hearing, which is the Ordinance of the Designating Intersections to be Regulated? Okay. If you would like to state your name and address for the record and you have three minutes to speak unless you are representing a group. You can...if you would like to speak to this Public Hearing. Anybody? Okay. Alright. No speak into the mic, it will be. Wait. Mr. O' Leary.

Mr. Lewis: Yes, my name is initials L. B. last name Lewis. I am here actually to speak to the next item on the agenda, but in listening to the discussion on this I have to ask myself why are patrons of the Bank being valued higher than ordinary citizens of West Hartford? I mean, there is no reason why they have to be able to make a left turn, which causes a possible safety hazard other than the convenience of the customers of the Bank. It is ridiculous. I do not understand why we are hear discussing it. It should not have even been on the table.

President Cantor: Thank you Mr. Lewis. Is there anybody else? Okay. With that, we will close this Public Hearing.

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